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RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 1127

RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 1035

RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0591

RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 0198

RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 0083

RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0487

RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0602

RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0583

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SUBJECT: CONDITIONS INSIDE CHHATTISGARH'S IDP CAMPS AS MONSOON SEASON BEGINS ARE WORRYING

REF: A) MUMBAI 1253 B) MUMBAI 358

Summary

¶1. (SBU) Due to escalating combat between government, Naxalite-insurgent, and tribal counter-insurgent forces, southern Chhattisgarh had a growing internally displaced persons (IDP) problem in its Dantewara district before monsoon season arrived in late June. Dantewara's 27 IDP camps have apparently quadrupled in size since the beginning of the year and now contain in excess of 60,000 persons. By most accounts the camps lack adequate shelter, food, and security. There are trafficking and other human rights abuses associated with the camps as well. The unspoken hope among Government of Chhattisgarh (GOC) officials seems to be that people will return to their burned villages and scattered livestock next year, but there appears to be little thinking underway about assistance packages, land restitution, or de-mining, all of which should figure prominently in any durable solution to the large scale internal displacement occurring in southern Chhattisgarh. In a separate discussion, a top Maharashtra police official told us how his state, which neighbors southern Chhattisgarh to the west, more effectively came to grips with Naxalism after viewing the insurgency primarily as a development issue rather than as a security challenge. End summary.

IDP Camps Grow

¶2. (SBU) The Dantewara district in southern Chhattisgarh has become India's hub for Naxalite violence in 2006 (ref A). Escalating combat between government, insurgent, and tribal counter-insurgent forces is swelling the district's twenty-seven IDP camp locations, as tribal people flee or are forcibly removed from their forest villages by both Naxalite and counter-insurgent forces. Based upon our interviews of GOC officials, Post reported in ref B that there were approximately 15,000 IDPs in Dantewara district as of February. That number swelled to 45,958 by early March, according to the Asian Center for Human Rights (ACHR). Much of that seems to reflect real growth, as opposed to amended counting. For example, the neighboring Konta, Arrabore and Dornapal camps opened only in mid-February, yet still accounted for 15,482 IDPs by March 4.

During a conversation with EconOff in late May, Mahendra Karma, Dantewara district's Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) and alleged leader of the "Salwa Judum" counter-insurgency, estimated IDP numbers to be in excess of 60,000. Post has been unable to identify any newer survey numbers.

Camp Conditions

¶ 3. (SBU) Southern Chhattisgarh clearly had a growing IDP problem in its Dantewara district before monsoon season arrived in late June. The region should experience heavy rains and periodic flooding through late September. There are potentially conflicting reports as to the standard of shelter in the camps. Many displaced villagers live in makeshift camps, some of which are only open-sided, thatched roof constructions, built without tarpaulin and exposed to the slanting downpours of windy monsoon storms, according to B.G. Verghese of ACHR, who visited several camps in early March. S.C. Sahai, Secretary of the Red Cross in Chhattisgarh, told us on July 6, however, that the GOC has completed shed-like constructions for IDPs in all camps. Sahai is relying in part on GOC representations to reach this conclusion, however, as he has not been to every camp. He also reports that despite heavy rains to date, and the Indravati River recently flowing 2.5 meters above its danger mark in nearby Bastar district, there have been no reported incidents so far of flooding or marooning in the camps.

¶ 4. (SBU) Dantewara's IDP camps are inadequately provisioned as well, we heard. The Red Cross only provided utensils, clothes and bed linen for approximately 15,000 IDPs. The ACHR inspection team reported that daily camp rations were one meal of beans and rice. IDPs lack money to buy food and the GOC's planned work-for-food program has been delayed by the monsoons, according to ACHR. Naxalites and Naxalite landmines have been

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killing hungry IDPs who venture back to abandoned villages for food, but they continue to go anyway, local papers report.

¶ 5. (SBU) Other NGOs fear to assist Dantewara's IDP camps because they believe Naxalites will attack and close other projects they are implementing in rural Chhattisgarh, we heard from Catholic Relief Services (CRS). The provision of supplies from Red Cross noted above may be the only non-governmental assistance to have reached these IDPs to date.

Trafficking, HIV/AIDS on the Rise in Camps

¶ 6. (SBU) CRS personnel also told us that lack of food and jobs among displaced people leads to higher rates of prostitution and sexual exploitation among displaced women and girls, and that this was occurring with greater frequency in southern Chhattisgarh. There is also a corresponding concern that HIV/AIDS infection rates may climb. Trafficking in child soldiers by Naxalites and Salwa Judum is widely alleged by civil society and the media.

¶ 7. (U) Security inside the camps is also an issue. Not only do Naxalites attack camps themselves, but on June 20, papers reported that insurgents killed seven persons and injured two others at Chikuariguda village in the Konta region in retaliation for the village's refusal to accompany them on a camp attack.

Locations and Sizes of Camps

¶ 8. (U) According to the Asian Centre of Human Rights (ACHR), which led a fact-finding mission to Dantewara district in April, camp locations and populations as of March 4 were as follows: Bhairamgarh (6806), Bangapal (1319), Nelsonar (525), Mirtur (1685), Matwada (3167), Kutru (1519), Farseghar (463), Pinkondha (165), Khodholi (71), Korkheli (100), Bhodli (210), Bhedore (350), Jhangla (2710), Etamkhudum (140), Cherpali (2556), Gangalur (3159), Bijapur (905), Murdhanda (551), Awapalli (662),

Bhangsa Gudha (505), Usur (1230), Geedam (1584), Dantewada (36),
Fharaspal (58), Konta (5015), Arrabore (4068), and Dornapal
(6399).

How Maharashtra Dealt With the Naxalite Insurgency

¶ 9. (SBU) In a separate discussion, J.J. Singh, Additional Chief of Police in the Maharashtra Police Anti-Terrorist Squad, explained to ConGenOffs Maharashtra's recipe for containing the Naxalite insurgency. Naxalism is more of a development issue than a law enforcement or security challenge, Singh said. Until the mid-1990s, Naxalite groups held sway over extended areas of eastern Maharashtra, much like the Naxalites effectively control southern Chhattisgarh today, he told us. Police were ineffective in fighting the insurgents simply because they had such difficulty reaching the areas under Naxalite control due to inadequate roads. In addition, the rebels won over the hearts and minds of local tribes because they provided rudimentary social services that the state had failed to deliver. The security situation changed, according to Singh, once the state began building more roads and hospitals and other facilities of the modern state in the previously isolated areas. The Naxalites understood the threat to their authority and vigorously tried to stop the development projects. They were ultimately unsuccessful, Singh claimed. He alleged that the state now controls much of the security situation in the eastern Maharashtra. Naxalites continue to attack the police presence there because the police are the most exposed and visible symbols of authority in the area, but the attacks are hit-and-run affairs that have failed to roll back state authority. Naxalites continue to extort companies in the area, but they are no longer able to establish and run the large scale protection rackets they launched against big companies in the 1990s, Singh said.

Comment

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¶ 10. (SBU) The situation in Dantewara's IDP camps as the monsoons begin is extremely worrying. Breakdown of social relationships and support structures, loss of jobs, hunger and inadequate shelter have made these IDPs especially vulnerable to violence and human rights violations. Moreover, the government's long term plans for these displaced persons are unclear. The unspoken hope among GOC officials seems to be that people will return to their burned villages and scattered livestock next year, but there appears to be little thinking underway about assistance packages, land restitution, or de-mining, all of which should figure prominently in any durable solution to the large scale internal displacement occurring in southern Chhattisgarh. End comment.

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